

It's up, it's down, it's Pilgrim Nuclear Plant

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In nuclear industry parlance, one might say Boston Edison could declare an "unusual event."

The utility's Pilgrim nuclear power plant has been up and running now for three weeks without stopping, for the first time in at least three years.

The troubled plant, which has produced electricity for only 48 percent of the time since it opened in 1972, is now running at 25 percent of its capacity and distributing 120 megawatts of electricity to the so-called New England power grid.

The Plymouth plant, closed down because of safety and management violations in April 1986, has been back on line since Dec. 30, inching its way up to full power under a phased restart program set by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The goal in December was to be fully operating by mid-April but unscheduled equipment failures have delayed the proceedings. Edison spokesmen now say the plant will be at 100 percent power by mid-summer.

The utility will ask the NRC for permission to advance to 50 percent power any day now, according to John Fidler, an Edison public relations

spokesman.

A restart panel, headed by NRC on-site inspector Clay Warren, is scheduled to meet this week, Warren said, to evaluate the plant's status.

"Things are generally going very well," Warren said. "We have been following things very closely. Ordinarily we log 2,500 hours of inspections in a 12-month period. In the past two months alone we have already recorded 2,800 hours."

Here is the status of several issues that opponents of the plant continue to cite as reasons for keeping Pilgrim in mothballs for now, if not forever:

- The absence of emergency evacuation plans:

A second petition filed in federal court by state Attorney General James Shannon to prevent the plant from operating until emergency plans are in place has been scheduled for hearing on an unassigned date in May. Shannon's first petition to the First Circuit Court was shot down March 7. The court told Shannon to refile his petition and asked him to be more specific about why a federal court might have jurisdiction over such matters when a federal regulatory agency is already responsible. Shannon also claims the plant should not have opened until a full

evidentiary hearing involving government officials, the NRC and Edison is held.

Shannon's suit may pack less power than it did to begin as the state Department of Public Safety continues to upgrade emergency plans.

Three of the five towns in the emergency planning zone — Marshfield, Kingston and Carver — completed draft plans to implement evacuation procedures, according to Peter Agnes, assistant director of public safety. Duxbury and Plymouth have nearly finished theirs, he said.

Right now the state plan, developed with the aid of about \$10 million from Edison, involves evacuating everyone from those towns to three so-called reception centers in Bridgewater, Taunton and Wellesley.

"There is disagreement over the capability of Taunton and Bridgewater," Agnes said. "The state takes the position these towns cannot function properly under the present plans. Edison says they can. We've given the whole things over to the Federal Emergency Management Agency."

Another month of planning is necessary, Agnes said. "Our goal is an exercise drill to test the procedures. That's probably going to take place in the fall."

- The cancer study:

The state Department of Public Health is interviewing leukemia victims in 22 towns within 17 miles of the plant. Their names come from a variety of sources, including hospitals, the state Cancer Registry and from private citizens. Not all the hospital data is in, so distribution information has not been made public. Public health officials say the results of the study will be available by the end of the summer.

- Who pays?

The state Department of Public Utilities is currently holding hearings on who will pay the power replacement bills incurred when Pilgrim was off-line. Edison customers have been paying for it all along. The hearings are meant to determine if Edison should pay for part of the cost, in which customers will be reimbursed.

Edison is expected to ask for a rate raise. Hearings will be scheduled on that issue. Combined with the rate raise hearings will be a petition from state Sen. William Golden, D-Weymouth, to remove Pilgrim from Edison's rate base. The rate base is determined in part by a utility's expenses.